



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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with instructions to stamp on its cover this motto in gold: "The Makers of Scotland." For "Cæsar and his contemporaries" we read Thomas North's *Plutarch*, that never-to-be-enough praised English classic; and for "The Makers of Scotland" we are intending to read Sheriff Charles Guthrie's edition of John Knox's monumental *History of the Reformation*, Mr. Taylor Innes's *John Knox*, and some other things on Knox, if we have time. All this costs a little money, I admit. But, then, on what better end can money be spent than in training my children into habits of scholarship and of intelligence that will accompany them, and will enrich them, and will be a blessing to them, all their after days?

(3) Another thing: I make a point of calling their attention, according to their years, to the best things that appear in the daily and weekly papers. To the young ones I point out any anecdote, or story, or other illustration of their school lessons, or of our home readings. And to the older ones I point out the best articles in *The Athenæum*, and *The Spectator*, and *The Speaker*, and *The Pilot*, alas! now no more, and other high-class journals; as also in the monthlies and the quarterlies. Just the other day, out of a single copy of *The Scotsman*, one of my boys cut an excellent column on ants and their ways, and put it among his memoranda to be read this summer. And out of the same issue he cut an article on John Knox, and placed it in an envelope on my desk, for preservation against my class-work next session on "The Makers of Scotland." And this scholarly little habit lays up well-kept stores of the best things we read in the papers of the day: things that, but for this methodical habit, would all be forgotten as soon as they are read, or remembered only to torture the indolent reader to remember when and where he read something on such and such a subject; something that he has clean forgotten, and cannot now, at any cost, recover.

(4) And then, with all that, I often remind my children, amid the multitude of their books, of Jacob Behmen, an old friend of mine, who used to say that he had no books; but, then, to make up for that want, he had himself. And they will always remember what they copied out last summer about Brutus out of *Seneca*—how that Brutus never read a book but in order to make himself a better man.

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE HABIT OF OBSERVING NATURE.

BY THE REV. CANON RAWNSLEY.

WE are met together as believers in an education not "of cram and jam," as so much of the education heretofore has been, but of that which alone has right and title to the term education,—the drawing out of the soul to strength and wisdom, the bringing out, from tiniest germ to full plant and flower, of mind and character. And if we glance round our classroom, the youngest and least observant of us will perceive that God has set us in a very fair school, has put us not into some dark ill-lighted room or a chamber which in the noonday shows us only blank walls, but in a world where the very darkness is made wonderful with innumerable stars, a world whose cloud-curtains at morn and eventide are gorgeously enwoven, and whose floor is rich with the varied purples of spring, the green luxury of summer, the flames of autumn and the grey draperies and dazzling whiteness of winter.

We are Britons, and if we had eyes to perceive the good fortune of the place of our birth, we should know what a singular blessing it is that we are natives of

"This precious stone set in the silver sea,"

and how "happy" "a breed of men" we might be, if we would use the powers God has given us to grow up as lovers of the fair schoolroom for Heaven in which our lot is cast. Not underneath the steady glare of the tropics, or the unchanging skies of Egypt, nor in the drear monotonous waste of the desert or the vast sierras are we sent to school. There is scarcely an hour of each day, the whole year through, but there falls about us gleam and shadow of cloud. And hardly a month but brings such change of growth to field and garden that we are forced to cry with the Psalmist, "Oh Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches." Islanders as we are, a nation of shipmen, we are obliged to add, "So is the great and wide sea also, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts."

Two wonder-worlds are ours to go to school in, as if our God had determined to call out all our powers. He has given us not only an emerald isle but a silver sea, whose deeps are as full of mystery of life as its surface is full of change and colour and glory.

I was talking lately with a member of the Challenger expedition. He told me that what most impressed him was the way in which the ocean floor at the depth of three miles or more was compact of tiny microscopic shells that were constantly raining down to the rest when life had ceased, whilst side by side with this future conglomerate or oolite limestone for the building of new worlds, creatures swam in similar depths whose bodies were so phosphorescent that they were like miniature passenger steamers seen at sea broadside on in a dark night, and riband-shaped fish, and fish unimaginable in quaintness of shape, all mouth and eyes as it seemed, sought food and found it in dusky waters never moved by wind or tide.

Now it was not for nothing that Divine Providence poured into this island home various races—Celt, Saxon, Dane, Viking, and Norman—that here with such changefulness of season and temperature, tree growth and flower growth, such variety of scene from the Highlands to Lowlands, from the hills of Cumbria and Wales to the level marshes of Lincolnshire, there should be bred and trained to full capacity of character a mixed race who should, by having all their faculties of perception called out, and all their imagination stirred by the great call of the Maker of this loveliness and beauty, be enabled to think rightly, live purely and happily, and help not Britain only but the world.

A nation of fighters by nature, whether with stone, axe, or Armstrong gun, with commerce and trade and art and literature, or with armies and navies in battle array, it seems that there has been given us as an incentive to our lives of strenuous endeavour a love of the homeland, and we, who speak of Greater Britain to-day, know that the bonds that bind us together are not dependent upon fiscal tariffs or the cash nexus, but are woven and made strong by affection inexpressible, more often unexpressed, but still there, a living power in the hearts of all for the dear old country with its downs and lawns and blessed

fields, its blue hills, its gleaming lakes, its rushing brooks, its willow-fringed rivers, its teeming harbours, its white cliffs, its purple misty headlands and far-gleaming shores of green.

You have to be on an ocean liner homeward bound, to see the change come into the faces and the tones of men and women swarthy from Indian suns or North African winds, as they near land, to know how deep lies in the soul of a Briton this love of Fatherland.

And it is because I believe that patriots will be more and more needed to help to bear the weight of empire in the coming years that I am bound to ask the attention of all educators to one of the secret springs whence this help for Britain may flow, and to urge them by all that lies in their power to bring the youngsters of their time to that kind nurse of true feeling, Nature, the mother of high thought and noble aspirations.

We cannot all be Wordsworths or John Ruskins, we may never be able to say with Wordsworth,

"From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had received so much that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling. I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still,
O'er all the lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart ;"

we may not be able to assert with him,

"Ye mountains, and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born,
If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
If mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
With God and Nature communing, removed
From little enmities and low desires,
The gift is yours,"

but if we can believe that round our children from their infancy, and at a time when most impressionable, at a time too when the eye is most keen to use its powers, and the world is each day made anew, there is a marvellous power and wisdom shaping our ends, that Nature is really tending us, taking us to herself, and making us her votaries, sending us with passion to the daisied fields and the budding woods, filling us with

delight in the cloud galleons sailing overhead, making us creep from our beds to wonder at the stars, then I am not without hope that we shall at least perceive the truth of Wordsworth's description of his own mind's making when he wrote:—

"Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath,
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart."

But one is met *in limine* with a great difficulty, we do not believe in Nature. "Love of Nature!" said a Yankee to me one day on the Hudson river, when I was exclaiming with some heat against the short-sighted folly of allowing a quarry company to blast away one of the fairest cliffs at one of the fairest points of view in a scene unparalleled for grandeur, "Do you say love of Nature, sir? There ain't a red cent in it! Why look at me sir. I ken go from here to Poughkeepsie and back on a day like this, and see nothing;" and turning to his wife he added, "Can't I, dear?" And his spouse jerked her head and answered approvingly to his appeal, "That's so."

It was a day of glorious October sun, and the woods swept down to the great silver rolling Hudson in all the most gorgeous garniture of autumnal colours. Love of Nature, though it had not a red cent in it for my friend, made *me* an enthusiastic lover of an American fall, and the vision of that day on the Hudson haunts me still. Where was the difference between us? It lay in the fact that we had been trained in different schools.

He was by trade, I found, "The greatest Antibug-bag Maker in the States," a manufacturer of huge creosoted sacks into which in August, when a house moth of a particular appetite for woollen goods comes about his business, the New Yorkers stow away all their carpets and curtains, and I expect that

for knowledge of creosote and brown paper and of the ways of the bug he would have given me points, but his eyes had been so long fixed on brown paper and creosote and bugs that he was colour-blind. The pomp of painted woodland, the flashing river-flood, moved him not; he had eyes, but saw not.

Now it seems to me that he had a heart and felt not. The red cent, yes! that appealed to him, but the riches and more than riches of the beauty of Nature and all its boons, scattered at his feet like flowers, the "store of ready wealth" that is daily showered from Heaven upon the poorest of the poor, if they have a mind and eye that opens and receives, this was denied him and he was starving in the midst of plenty.

We all of us feel and know the power of the "red cent" to kill human sympathy, to blind our eyes and harden our hearts. And it is because Nature study is one of the fairest instruments I know in counteracting this evil and in keeping hearts and eyes swift to perceive the truer riches, that I was willing to respond to your secretary's call and am glad to be here at your Educational Conference to-day.

What then is the first requisite article of faith for those of us who believe it to be national work, this education of the seeing eye and the hearing ear?

I answer fearlessly—a belief that Nature is not a dead mechanical thing, but a revelation of God's love to usward. Behind the dewy veils of morning, the gleam of golden noon, the rosy lights of eventide, in the pomp of cloudland, in the voice of many waters, in silent tarn, in roaring cataract, in purple bud, in first green leafage, in seedtime and harvest, in tender February moss, in March lichens, in Maytide leafage, in Junetide fern, in all the succession of the flowers, in the coming and going of the birds, there is a voice that has a message for our souls, the voice of a King Whom in His beauty we must learn to look on here, if we would behold Him in the land that is very far off. Very well did Ruskin write, and fitly are the words placed on his monument at Friars Crag:—"His life is in the air that you breathe, His glory in the light that you see, in the fruitfulness of the earth and the gladness of His creatures. He has written for you day by day His revelation, as He has given you day by day your daily bread."

And the next thing for us to believe is surely that God has

given us all this fair revelation, not for our time only but for all generations, and we who do not do what we can to hand on intact this great legacy of natural beauty to town dwellers and country dwellers alike, we who allow without protest a single fair scene to be turned into a rubbish heap or to be darkened with the blight of smoke, who stand quietly by and see a single fair stream polluted past all power of life, are not doing our duty as true citizens of a land that might, if we would but have it so, prepare our souls and the souls of those who come after for Heaven.

But no amount of fair scenery or unpolluted air or stream can touch our hearts if we have not learned by constant practice the use of our eyes, and it is here where as educators our work must first begin. My old headmaster, Edward Thring, never did a kinder thing for the VI. form boys under him than to set them a copy of verses, now elegiacs, now iambics, now English poetry, now English prose, on the subject "To-day." We knew how mercilessly he would come down upon the unfortunate lad who wrote the ordinary nothings and common-places of what he would call the blind boy. I can hear his tones of sarcasm still as he put his blue pencil stroke through the line or the passage, "The sky was blue, the grass was green." "Of course it was," said he, "I didn't want you to tell me that; I wanted to know how in its colour it differed to-day from yesterday," and the blind boy's work would be torn through from top to bottom in a moment. But let a lad say how the light through the new beech leaf shone as if it shone through glass, and how all the air beneath their boughs seemed to swim with emerald; let a lad say how the celandine starred the bank and the coltsfoot filled the air with a scent of honey, how the bees were busy in the palm flower and the elms were rosy red with the promise of spring, then Thring would smile almost aloud and say, "Yes, precisely so, you have got eyes, and know how to use them."

I was reading over again but the other day that very interesting address given by William Morris to the Birmingham School of Art in 1894: "The real question," said Morris, "is that we who have not lost the use of our eyes should go on pestering the rest of the public until we have more or less convinced them that it would be a good thing for them to

recover the capacity of seeing, just as it would be a good thing to recover the use of their legs if they were lame. . . . Having convinced our blind neighbours that is a good thing to see, I think we should have won half the battle. . . . That being accepted there comes, I say, that question as to how those who have not the use of their eyes and desire to gain it, can be helped by those who have the said use. . . . Now I say there are two things to be done by the seers for the nonseers. The first is to show them what is to be seen on the earth, and the next to give them opportunities for producing matters, the sight of which will please themselves and their neighbours, and the people that come after them. To train them in short in the observation and creation of beauty and incident."

How true and sound Morris' advice is I have been able to see in that experiment in Industrial Art which Mrs. Rawnsley has been able to carry on for the past twenty years in the little town of Keswick.

I much wish I had been able to have here specimens of work not only carried out but designed by workers who began metaphorically as blind men—they would tell you so themselves—and now cannot go out for a single country walk without seeing new forms of loveliness in every roadside branch or flower.

You, who are here met to-day, are determined as educators to share your power of seeing with the pupils who will come or who are under your care. And though you may not be able to set going Industrial Schools of Art, you certainly have it in your power to teach them the joy of creation that comes from the handling of a pencil or a brush of colour.

And if this kind of creation fails, you can set them to another kind of creation, the literary; and you will be astounded how the actual joy and enthusiasm of having seen any of the many revelations of Nature's fairyland will so possess them that they will not rest till they have put pen to paper to describe what they have seen. I remember Ruskin saying to me once, "The two most helpful bits of work that a man can do for his time is to get people to observe carefully and encourage them to describe accurately what they have seen"; and no man in our generation better practised what he preached.

Already the schoolmasters and mistresses of our elementary schools are alive to the importance of this training in accurate observation. The Association for Nature study we have inaugurated for the schoolmasters and mistresses of Cumberland is certainly endeavouring to guide the scholar to care for the fauna and flora, the geology and meteorology of the county, and will from time to time urge their putting down on paper what they have seen. And in this connection I wish to refer to the little effort I have made through the help of the "Bird Protection Society" by the gift of a challenge shield to the elementary schools that care to compete, to encourage the children not only to watch the bird life and tree life through the varying year, but to urge them to put on paper the observations they have made. It was a real pleasure to me last year to read the essays written and illustrated by pen and pencil by the scholars of Warcop School, in Westmoreland, who won a similar challenge shield for the county. One rose from the perusal of these essays with the thought that tree and bird had been for those young naturalists a liberal education which would last for life. We should never hear of any of them setting traps for buzzards, or shooting owls or kestrels, or stoning squirrels, or liming twigs for bullfinches. They had begun friendships which could not cease, and for them one felt the coming and the going of the leaf of elm and oak and rowan and birch and elder was new interest that would make each lane and copse more dear.

Indirectly this great school of Nature study which is being opened to all willing scholars will be doing a national work that is much needed. It will tend to make growing lads and lasses feel that the country is not the dull place they had begun to believe. The craze for city life can only by such inducements to care for the countryside be moderated. Once get the young people to become familiar with the wonder-world of a common pond, or a single hedgerow, and they will not care to exchange their haunts for the bewildering mazes of brick and mortar where flowers can only be found in the baskets of the flower sellers, and the green leaf becomes a black one ere it has seen a month of sunless grime. I spoke to a young man a few weeks ago who had by his reading of a single work of John Ruskin been led to use his eyes to the

beauty of his surroundings. He said, "I had quite made up my mind to go to the colonies and try to make a fortune, but I have determined that I can now have a happier life as a poor man here in Cumberland and I am not going."

It is one of the real unkindnesses to the people that our elementary education, in its dealing with the future of our country lads up till now, has been guilty of, that it has done little or nothing to get them from their earliest days so to use their eyes and ears as to find that the fields they will plow or the fells they will drive their flocks to are full of pleasant companions and solace for their hard working days. I thankfully acknowledge that in the school garden movement there are signs of a better time coming, and the farm schools established by County Councils, and lectures on plant life and bee life, on poultry rearing and butter making, and veterinary science, all are in the right direction.

As I wrote these lines, I broke off involuntarily, for a new voice sounded in the garden trees, and I heard a voice that told me of a friend from other lands—the chiff-chaff had come again. I was half expecting him; I saw in the morning paper that he was heard on April 4th, at Chester, and my last year's diary has told me to expect him on the 5th, but what a delight to meet and greet the little herald of the Spring. How many things have happened since first he trilled with happy little "tremolo jubilante" this time last year almost to a day. But if I had not learned his note as a lad, I should have gone on stolidly with my work, and perhaps should have hardly realised that April had brought to every garden bower of Cumberland the sweetness and the joyance of this dainty little singer from over sea.

You say, "Oh, of course, everybody knows a chiff-chaff when one hears it." I wish I could think this was true of twenty per cent. of our British scholars. The fact is that we educators take too much for granted. We think the boys and girls under training by us will learn all about the birds because they are country children. We make a vast mistake. Unless in quite early days their attention is called to them, they grow up careless of these angel presences, and pass to their work afield unhelped by the very helpers that the season brings them. It was only last year that I heard quite an

animated discussion on the top of a coach between Keswick and Ambleside as to what certain black birds were in a meadow. Crows said some, rooks said others, though none knew the difference between rooks and crows; the fact was that they were jackdaws with as grey heads and garrulous harsh voices and pert talk as ever jackdaws were blessed with; and I remember Lord Tennyson telling me how after reading "Maud" aloud to a few friends, a lady, who might be supposed to be an educated person had said, "What birds were they that

'In the high Hall garden, when twilight was falling,
Maud! Maud! Maud! were crying and calling,'"

and when Tennyson said, "Well, what birds do say Maud! Maud! Maud! madam?" replied, "I don't know unless it was the blackbirds," and Tennyson answered, "Yes, they were blackbirds, caw! caw! caw!"

But not only are we bound to do what we can to bring the birds and their habits to the minds of those we teach, but the flowers of the field will become friends also, and when they fail, the mosses and the lichens will give joy to the eye and thought to the mind. Ah, the beauty of an ordinary wall in such a month as February—silver washed with emerald, who can describe it!

"How is one to tell," as Ruskin put it, "of the rounded bosses of furred and beaming green, the starred divisions of ruby bloom, fine-fibred as if the rock spirits could spin porphyry as we do glass, the traceries of intricate silver and fringes of amber, lustrous, arborescent, burnished through every fibre into fitful brightness of glossy traverses of silken change, yet all subdued and pensive and framed for simplest sweetest office of grace. They will not be gathered like the flowers for chaplet or love token, but of these the wild bird will make its nest, and the weaned child its pillow."

Now it seems to me that in this quest for the wonderful and beautiful in Nature, we must set a watch upon our meddling intellect; we must not, as Wordsworth put it, "murder to learn." There is just the chance that we may be led to care too much for mere museum-craft, for cataloguing and collecting and dissecting, and not quite enough for the thought and poetry that these wonders minister to. And I would, if I may, in conclusion, urge that we must all do what we can to see that

the power of that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude and the power of reflection be stimulated, and to give the imagination its rightful place in any nature studies that we undertake. What do I mean? Well, take as an instance Ruskin's account of a mica flake as a type of the things that "out of weakness are made strong." Let us read and re-read his passage on this subject in the sixteenth chapter of the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, or his fine passage on the Campagna of Rome in the preface to the second edition of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, and we shall soon see how the mind can be filled with great thought by the brilliant atom of a pulverised rock, or charmed into a sense of death and loneliness by a scene of solemn desolation; or the passage on the Pine and its mountain growth in chapter four of the fifth book of *Modern Painters*, and again on the aspect of Clouds in chapter four of the first volume, and we shall find how if only the imagination be quick and alive, that rock and sky and tree and plain are filled with an overseeing power to kindle and restrain.

And it is this quickening of the imagination which after all will be, if we care for literature, its own reward. It is impossible to exaggerate the added joy and delight that comes to the student of Nature in his reading of the poets, if he by his accurate observation is led to an appreciation of their niceties and subtleties that have come to them through their use of the trained eye. I remember talking once with Tennyson about the stupidity which poets had to deal with. He said, "I once wrote a line in 'Maud' in which I wished to describe the effect of a girl in a handsome dress moving across a lawn, and I said 'Her feet have touched the meadow and left the daisies rosy,' and none of the women I read it to knew what I meant. But anyone who had seen the underside of a daisy would have understood at once. How could any young girl with a long skirt have crossed a daisied lawn and not left the daisies rosy?"

We in Cumberland and Westmoreland and you in Scotland are thrice blessed; we cannot escape the charm of the distant hills that breed the cloud, and break the storm, and feed the streams, and fill each day from dawn to eve with witchery of change and colour.

There is not a child in our village schools, or in

your High schools, but may be taught to "lift its eyes to the hills whence cometh aid." And what are these hills there for—hills like Skiddaw older than any Alpine range we know, but "to fill the thirst of the learner's heart for the beauty of God's working, and to startle its lethargy with the deep and pure agitation of astonishment." And those of us who dwell among the hills, know how true was the saying of that last of our Lakeland poets, who wrote, "Even among our own hills of Scotland and Cumberland, though often too barren to be perfectly beautiful, and always too low to be perfectly sublime, it is strange how many deep sources of delight are gathered into the compass of their glens and vales, and how down to the most secret cluster of their far away flowers, and the idlest leap of their straying streamlets, the whole heart of Nature seems thirsting to give, and still to give, shedding forth her everlasting beneficence with a profusion so patient, so passionate, that our utmost observance and thankfulness are but at last neglect of her nobleness and apathy to her love."

Students of Nature as by being members of a National Education Union we are called upon to be, at least we will help to leave the men and women of the next generation more thankfully observant of her common gifts, and less neglectful of the glory of the world wherein as British folk it is their lot to dwell.

But beyond all value as educating the eyes of our young people, this habit of observing Nature has surely higher work to do in educating the heart. Why is it that the naturalist and the botanist and geologist seem always the gentlest of men and tenderest hearted of women? Why is it that if in humble life you meet a man who cares for these things, you find at once a kind of natural refinement about him? The Jonathan Otleys and the Jonathan Edwards are gentlemen with a grace that impresses all who come in contact with them. Surely it is because they have "come forth into the light of things and let Nature be their teacher." They have found:—

"She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness."

The gentleness of the earth is in their blood—innocence of trees and ferns and flowers has infected them; the unselfishness of waning star in Heaven or fading blossom star on earth, the prodigality of bloom, the unweariedness of praise in falling water or in singing bird has touched their hearts. They realize that with a wonderful community of intent, these things serve God and speak of his praise. They enter with joy into that communion and feel the glory of ministering brotherhood. They become wide-hearted in the discovery of this unity for, as Ruskin puts it, "The unity of spirits is partly in their sympathy and partly in their giving and taking and always in their love—and these are their delight and their strength." It is by these sympathies—

"Aloft ascending and descending deep
Even to the inferior kinds"—

that we all become more fit to be with God. "He who loves not God, nor his brother, cannot love the grass beneath his feet, nor the creatures which live not for his uses, filling those spaces in the universe which he needs not: while, on the other hand, none can love God, nor his human brother, without loving all things which his Father loves; nor without looking upon them every one as in that respect his brethren also, and perhaps worthier than he, if, in the under concords they have to fill, their part is touched more truly."

And I think we may all agree with the teacher whose words I have just quoted that the love of Nature instead of being connected with the faithlessness of the age is precisely the most healthy element that distinctly belongs to us, and that out of it—cultivated no longer in levity or ignorance, but in earnestness and as a duty—results will spring of an importance at present inconceivable, and lights will arise which for the first time in man's history will reveal to him the true nature of his life, the true field for his energies and the true relations between him and his Maker.